
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

NEWS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

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NOAA03-R119
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 03, 2003

NOAA TEDS RULE GOES INTO EFFECT
For Most Shrimpers, New Turtle Excluder Device (TEDs) Rules
Mean Minor Modifications to Nets

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) published regulations on February 21 to enhance TEDs' effectiveness in reducing sea turtle deaths that result from trawling in the southeastern United States. The regulations take effect in state and federal waters on April 15, 2003, in the Atlantic, and August 21, 2003, in the Gulf of Mexico. Fishermen have until those dates to complete what, for most, are minor modifications to increase the size of the turtle escape opening.

NOAA Fisheries is providing technical information, instructions and other outreach to help fishermen configure their gear to meet the new turtle excluder device (TEDs) regulations. NOAA is an agency of the Department of Commerce.

The new rule will ensure that the TED openings on shrimp trawl nets are big enough to release large sea turtles up to the size of large loggerhead turtles in inshore waters (bays and sounds inside the COLREGS lines), and up to the size of leatherback turtles in offshore waters of the Gulf and Atlantic. These turtles are too large to escape through the minimum escape opening sizes required in the previous regulations.

The new rule will significantly reduce deaths of large loggerhead turtles, a threatened species; and leatherback turtles, an endangered species.

“Our focus now is to make sure that shrimpers understand what this new rule means to them,” said NOAA Fisheries’ Director Bill Hogarth. “Many fishermen already have grids that comply with the required size openings, and won’t have to make changes. For most of the rest, their existing gear can be modified by enlarging the escape opening in the net, and installing a new, larger flap over the opening.”

NOAA Fisheries has tested the larger opening TEDs extensively aboard commercial boats and found that the double-cover design (one of the allowed modifications) had equal catches of shrimp when compared to the smaller, existing TED openings. Additionally, the larger TED openings increase the TED’s ability to release turtles and exclude debris. “We want to get fishermen the information they need so they can modify their gear correctly and ensure the best possible performance,” Hogarth added.

NOAA Fisheries gear specialists and Sea Grant fisheries experts are traveling to Southeast shrimping ports, visiting net shops and docks to meet with Fishermen and answer their questions. Fishermen are encouraged to take advantage of these visits when the gear experts are in their area.

Fishermen may also call NOAA Fisheries gear specialists for assistance at (228)762-4591. Video tapes explaining the new rule and showing how to make the escape opening modification are available upon request.

NOAA Fisheries gear specialists have developed step-by-step guidelines that show fishermen how to modify their TEDs. They are available on the Internet at <http://www.mslabs.noaa.gov/teds.html>. Fishermen can make the modifications themselves in under 30 minutes, with less than \$25 of material costs, or spend an estimated \$45 to have the modification done at a net shop.

The new rule also increases the minimum size of the TED grid (the hardware portion of the TED). Because larger TED grids perform better at excluding debris and retaining shrimp, most shrimpers are using TED grids that exceed the minimum required sizes already.

The regulatory change is expected to affect few to no fishermen in the Atlantic, and only a small percentage of the fishermen in the Gulf. Those fishermen whose current TED grids are too small will have to buy new grids at an average cost of \$220 for a new TED, which would already include a large escape opening.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitats. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

The entire Federal Register notice for the rule can be viewed on line at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR3/regulations.html.